

Check on workers' medical status

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Cabinet has decided to set up private companies to monitor the medical examinations of foreign workers in their home countries following complaints of falsification of health certificates, said Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng.

He said the companies were required to ensure that the workers underwent the mandatory medical checks, including X-rays and laboratory tests, required by the Malaysian Government.

"The companies will be set up before the year end in consultations with the Home Ministry," he told reporters yesterday after receiving a RM100,000 contribution from Pharmaniaga Bhd for sponsorship of the SMI Phoenix Award.

Pharmaniaga managing director Azhar Hussain handed over the mock cheque to Chua for the award, to be bestowed on companies that had staged dramatic recoveries following the 1997 financial crisis at the SMI Recognition Award ceremony on Oct 3.

Chua said the ministry was implementing the new system to prevent unhealthy workers from coming into the country.

He was commenting on a private television report on Tuesday that 90% of the foreigners in Malaysia identified with

diseases were legal workers who were in the country for the first time.

The network quoted Fomema's chief executive officer Dr Mohamed Haniffa Abdullah as saying that the workers' health problems were only discovered when they were sent for health examinations after one year.

Chua said the ministry had received reports that some of the foreign workers had obtained health certificates from clinics in their home countries without undergoing the mandatory checks while some had obtained false certificates.

Chua said 235,362 foreign workers came into the country last year, of whom 13,000 were chosen for random medical screening on arrival.

"Of these 4.2% failed the tests, with 467 with Hepatitis B, 41 with syphilis, 11 with HIV, 11 were pregnant and 15 others with traces of drugs in their urine," he said, adding that all of them had been deported.

In Putrajaya, Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said Malaysian employers who recruited non-professional foreign workers would soon be allowed to hold the original passports of their workers.

The new move, he said, was aimed at ensuring that foreign workers who were in the country worked in a specific sector and did not get involved in other things.

This new regulation will be included

in all new Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to be signed between the Malaysian Government and those of the countries that "supplied" workers for the local job market.

"This is another way of regulating the movements of foreign workers. We have to do this because their number is increasing and we need a way to be able to keep tabs of their movements," he told reporters after his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting yesterday.

Dr Fong said the workers would be issued a special identification paper by the Immigration Department to enable them to move about freely and the paper would be recognised by all enforcement authorities in the country.

These new terms of agreement have already been included in the MoU signed by the Government with Sri Lanka for the recruitment of its workers here last week and will be included in all other MoUs to be signed later, including the recruitment of Chinese artisans for the local manufacturing sector.

Another MoU with the Indonesian government will be signed in one or two months.

Dr Fong said all the terms of agreement with Indonesia had already been agreed to in principle during the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri in Kuching last week.